

Teens lend a hand to urban kids

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

ROCHESTER — "How are you today? What are you working on? Let's see what you're doing," Kevin Lindner said to a young girl as she took a seat next to him.

Kevin and the girl spent much of the next hour sharpening her drawing skills. Meanwhile, several other teen-aged tutors were spread across two meeting rooms, also assisting youngsters with their homework.

That's the scene every Wednesday at the Urban Center, where children get the benefit of one-on-one tutoring in a friendly environment. According to Sister of St. Joseph Marilyn Pray, evangelization coordinator for Holy Apostles Parish, the second-year tutoring program has received a big boost from suburban volunteer teens.

They hail from Holy Apostle's partner parish, St. John of Rochester in Perinton. Since the school year began Maryellen Bashaw, youth minister, has rounded up a group of St. John's youth-group members and driven them to the Urban Center, located across from Holy Apostles Church on the city's west side. Approximately six to eight teens join in weekly with other volunteers at the center. There they help elementary-school children who, according to Sister Pray, are from the immediate neighborhood and learned about the



Sixteen-year-old Laura Palermo (right), a parishioner at St. John of Rochester in Perinton, tutors 8-year-old Shawnta Coleman, a student at Rochester's School No. 30, at Holy Apostle Parish's Urban Center in Rochester Jan. 15.

Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

tutoring program through flyer distribution.

Though the hour-long gatherings always end with snacks, the primary focus is on learning, Kevin stated. "This is not time to goof off. You come here to get your homework done," said Kevin, 18.

Indeed, on a recent Wednesday, many of the youths appeared to need help with their multiplication homework. And Amanda Lanza, 13, a first-time participant, worked enthusiastically on social studies and

Youth

spelling with Sarah Bashaw, the youth minister's daughter.

"She's nice," Amanda said of her tutor.

Forming a good relationship is a huge priority, said Sarah Bashaw, who recently earned her teaching degree from Bowling Green University in Ohio and has experience working with inner-city children. "We're a huge role model for them," she said. "I think they need someone to relate to them. They may have parents who have to work, and don't have the time to spend with them on homework and discipline."

"I think their biggest problem isn't lack of intelligence, it's lack of dedication. They don't have any incentive at home," said a teen tutor, Kate McGowan, 17.

"They just really like having a teenager sit and pay attention to them. That means a lot to them," Sister Pray said. Added Sister of St.

Joseph Lorraine Julien, who also assists with the tutoring: "The kids need one-on-one. They're in a huge group in school and get lost in the shuffle."

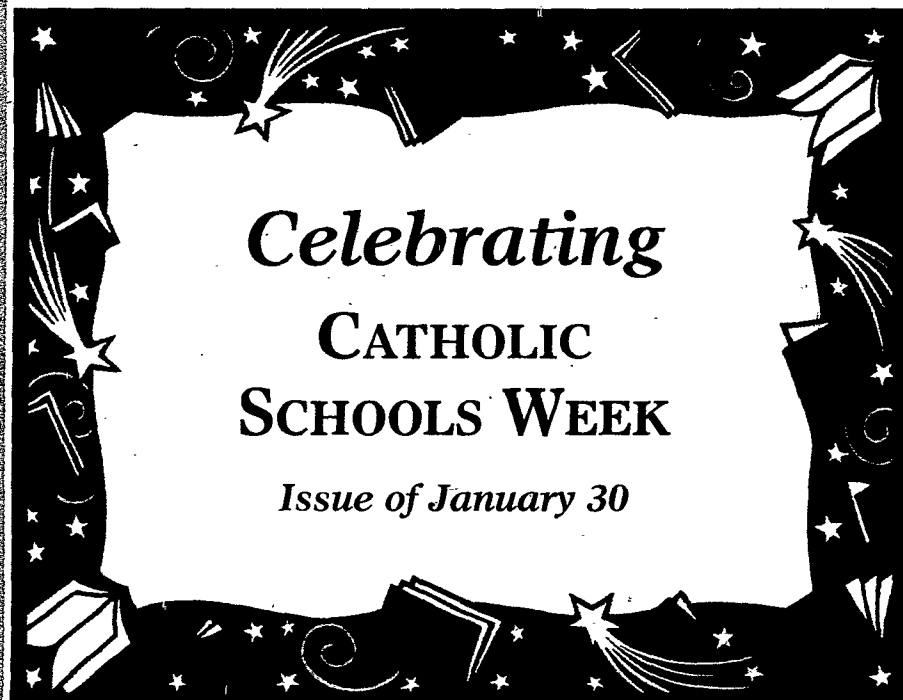
Kate said she was struck by the challenging environment in which these children exist, where they take getting into fights at school in stride. "It's a glimpse of how life is that you don't experience (in the suburbs)," she said.

At first, she said, some of the children were shy and reserved toward her. But as time has gone on, trust has been built: "Now they don't want you to leave. They know your name, they know you care about them."

This connection also provides a lift for Kate, who calls tutoring at the Urban Center one of the highlights of her week. "I look forward to it. (The children are) refreshing, you have fun with them. They make me laugh," she said.

And Kevin, who originally volunteered to complete his service requirement at McQuaid Jesuit High School, has continued tutoring even though he's fulfilled his hours quota. In fact, he often drives to the house of three young siblings if they don't show up right away, just to see if they need a ride to the Urban Center.

"I just come out of fun," Kevin said. "It makes you leave here with a smile."



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